

THE RITUAL OF THE CUP

I shall begin by summarizing some research which recently caused me to return to a text I had been meaning to study for some years. A translation of this text seemed to be the best tribute I could offer to our friend in this jubilee volume, because its roots are in Islamic gnosticism. And our colleague, H.-C. Puech, is no stranger to anything connected with gnosticism — in one way or another, all scholars in this field owe something to him. A text: My attention was drawn to the “Ritual of the Cup” (whose translation is given at the end of this essay) while preparing a selection of seven Persian treatises dealing with the *futuwwat*. Without going into too much detail on the meaning of this Arabic word (*javanmardi* is the Persian equivalent), let us say that it is best translated by the concept of “spiritual chivalry.” Traditionally, *futuwwat* denotes an intermediate station between that of the simple believer and the Sufi. It is deeply rooted in Shiism, and more generally in Islamic esotericism. Comparisons of Islamic chivalry with that of our own Knights Templar date from long before our era, and many questions have been raised as to the contacts that might have taken place. The *futuwwat* notably includes a ritual of fellowship, both sym-

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bolic and functional, which also appears during the flowering of the European trade-guilds, such the "Compagnons du Devoir" in France.<sup>1</sup>

Now, the *futuwwat* initiation includes a "ritual of the cup," established by the Prophet Mohammed himself. Following the well-known episode where he declares to the Imam 'Ali: "Thou art the knight of this community," the Prophet calls for a cup of water and some salt to be brought. He mixes three pinches of salt into the water, one after another. While dropping the first pinch into the cup, he declares: "This is the *shari'at*;" (the Law, or literal religion); with the second, he declares: "This is the *tariqat*;" (the mystical path to gnosis); and with the third, "This is the *haqiqat*." (personal self-realization of gnosis).<sup>2</sup> Hence the triad of ideas which holds sway over the whole of Islamic spirituality and esotericism, is hereby consecrated in a ritual act which has been preserved down through the centuries. There is even a threefold categorization of "knights," according to their type of commitment in the *futuwwat*: engagement through the word which has been given (*qawli*), through the sword (*sayfi*), or through participation in the cup (*shurbi*).<sup>3</sup>

However, there is another tradition which tells us that in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Traité des compagnons-chevaliers (Rasâ'il-e javânmardân)*, recueil de sept "Fotowwat Nâmeh" published by M. Sarrâf, with analytical introduction by H. Corbin, "Bibliothèque Iranienne," vol. XX, Tehran-Paris, 1973. In his *Opera minora*, L. Massignon notes that "it has been observed that the signs of recognition are the same in the Scottish Rite as among the Druzes." Unfortunately, he gives no references for this. Cf. also H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. IV Paris, Gallimard, 1973-1978, general index under chevalerie.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. in the *Traité des compagnons-chevaliers...*, the *Fotowwat Nâmeh de 'Abdorrazzaq Kâshânî*, pp. 16-20, of the portion in French.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the *Fotowwat Nâmeh de Najmoddîn Zarkûb Tabrîzî*, 1st part, chap. II.

Mohammed's youth, previous to his prophetic mission, there existed a chivalric order (*futuwwat-dari*) whose ritual involved a cup of wine, rather than salted water. Abu Jahl, one of his uncles, was accompanied by four hundred comrades who practised this rite. Later, it happened that forty<sup>4</sup> of the Prophet's companions, youths of his own generation, asked him to enact for them a *futuwwat* which would also involve a practice of the ritual of the cup, while invoking its name. He did so by eliminating the use of wine, whence the sacrament of the salted water. The traditions thus inform us of the origins of the institution, which existed in different forms. Abu Jahl, interpreting this as competition, was inflamed by wrath, and it is from this point on that hostility to the Prophet took root in him.<sup>5</sup> This ritual of the wine-cup recalls that of 'Abu'l-Khattab, though we have so far uncovered neither historical nor legendary links between them.

For a deeper understanding of this theme, a typological study is clearly called for. In such a hierarchic esoteric fellowship, we especially need to know the essential link which is established between the vow of commitment and the ritual of the cup. This recalls the importance of the *krater* (Grail) which was employed in the mysteries of Mithra. And of course it cannot fail to remind us of the mystical Christian cup of the Last Supper. This example is especially related to the ritual just mentioned, performed by Abu'l-Khattab. As expressed through this personage, the ritual has its origins in Shiite gnosticism in general, but especially in that form of it known as Nusayrism. In the Nusayri liturgical calendar of specifically Shiite festival rites, there are

<sup>4</sup> Of course these figures of 400 and 40 are significant as symbolic numbers, not as statistical truths.

<sup>5</sup> See same reference in note 3.

two which originated in Mazdean Persia (*Now-Ruz*, or the New Year, and *Mehrgan*), and two of Christian origin (Christmas and Holy Thursday). This is already enough to indicate a very original gnostic family of related traditions. Discussions of this subject have gone on at length about "syncretism." But from the gnostics' own point of view, the recognition of other lamps which are lighted in the same way, is of an order of thought which is the opposite of this so-called syncretism.

In order to understand the ceremony of the cup thus described, we need to have a minimum of information, concerning the person of Abu'l-Khattab on the one hand, and the rituals of the Nusayri on the other. Abu'l Khattab (died 762 C.E.) is a tragic figure whose deeds and teachings are closely linked with the emergence of Ismailism and Shiite Ismaili gnosticism. As for the Nusayri, they have long been a subject of Orientalist study, as an example par excellence of Islamic "secret societies." It is particularly difficult to gain access to their doctrines.<sup>6</sup> Their name and origin are derived from Abu Shu'ayb Mohammed *Ibn Nusayr* al-Namiri (died circa 884), whose mission is commemorated on the 17th of March in their liturgical calendar. Sometimes they are also known under the name of the *Namiriyan*. Today, they are officially known as the "Alawi." They consider themselves as belonging to the Twelver Shiites,<sup>7</sup> but with some important differences. They separate themselves from the *ja'fari* Imamism of contemporary Persia. They agree with the recognition of the Hidden Imam, but have

some divergences regarding the entry into occultation (*ghaybat*) of the Twelfth Imam. Ibn Nusayr declared himself to be the *Bab* (the portal, or door) for the Eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, and did not accord recognition to the first two delegates or representatives (*safir, na'ib*) of the Twelfth Imam, who is presently hidden.<sup>8</sup>

Other divergences occur regarding the character of Abu'l-Khattab. This is illustrated sufficiently by his exaltation to the rank of prophet (*nabi*) or the equivalent. Nusayrism has preserved the most radical positions of Shiite gnosticism, and these were founded by Abu'l-Khattab during the lifetime of the Sixth Imam himself, Ja'far al-Sadiq. From this time on, Khattabi and Ismaili positions must be considered in relation to one another.

We already can already glimpse the true significance of the fact that it is in a Nusayri context that we find this ritual associated with Abu'l-Khattab, which we describe here as a "Shiite liturgy of the Grail."

#### THE FIGURE OF ABU'L-KHATTAB

His full name was Abu'l-Khattab Mohammed ibn Abi Zaynab Miqlas al-Asadi Al-Kufi (sometimes rendered as Mohammed... Ibn Abi'l-Khattab). One of the greatest Islamic figures of the 8th century, his was a tragic destiny.<sup>9</sup> He was undoubtedly the first to conceive and organize a movement which was explicit-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Strothmann, *Morgenländische Geheimsekten in Abendländischer Forschung und die Handschrift Kiel Arab. 19*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1953; L. Massignon, "Esquisse d'une bibliographie nosayrie (1938)" in *Opera minora*, vol. I, pp. 640 sqq.

<sup>7</sup> On Twelver Shiism, see my *En Islam Iranien...*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Maimûn ibn al-Kâsim von Tiberias (circa 1035), *Festkalender der Nusairier (Majmû' al-a'yâd)*, *Grundlegendes Lehrbuch im Syrischen Alwitenstaat*, hrsgb. von R. Strothmann (*Der Islam*, Bd. XXVII), Berlin, 1946, pp. 3, sqq. [henceforth abbreviated here as *Festkalender...*]. See also *En Islam Iranien...* vol. IV index under *ghaybat*, Imam (XIIth).

<sup>9</sup> See Al-Kashi, *Kitab ma'rifat akhbar al-rijal*, Bombay, 1317 A.H., pp. 187-199.

ly *batini* — in other words, esoteric and gnostic.<sup>10</sup> He was on intimate terms with the Sixth Imam, Mohammed al-Baqir (died 733), as well as the Seventh, Ja'far al-Sadiq (died 765) — until the latter disavowed him. But in spite of this (or rather because of it), he remained faithful, all the way to his own martyrdom, to the Imam and to that doctrine which cannot be uttered without profaning it.

A notion of the degree of their intimacy is given by the episode where Imam Ja'far placed his hand on Abu'l-Khattab's breast, and declared: "Remember, and never forget! You know that which is hidden. You have now become the treasure-chest of my knowledge and the lodge of my secret. Unto you I entrust our living and our dead."<sup>11</sup> In a longer version of this scene of investiture (which dates from the time of Nusayri Khasibi), it is described as a re-enactment of the encounter between the Prophet Mohammed and Salman Parsi (Salman the Persian, also called Salman the Pure). "O Salman!" said the Prophet, "You have now become the treasure-chest of my knowledge and the lode of my secret, the code of all that I advocate and forbid. Henceforth you are the rectifier of believers in our way,

and, by God's will, the Portal (*al-Bab*) and home of the science of the letter and the science of exegesis (*ta'wil*), the interior of the secret and the secret of the secret. You are blessed in your beginning and in your end, blessed without and within, blessed in life and in death." These solemn words of the Prophet to Salman are said to be the same as those which Imam Ja'far said to Abu'l-Khattab.<sup>12</sup> Was their meaning nullified by the events which followed? Or were those events rather explained by a mysterious saying of the Imam, which had to do with the destiny of gnostics in this world?

Abu'l-Khattab's doctrines are the same as those found in the oldest Ismaili treatise we know of, the *Risala-ye Umm al-Kitab* (The Mother of the Book, i.e., the archetype), edited in Persian.<sup>13</sup> It appears that we find traces of these doctrines in writings which come from the reformed Ismailism of Alamut. It is expressly stated there that "the Ismaili religion was founded by the disciples of Abu'l-Khattab, who sacrificed their lives because of their love for Isma'il, the son of Ja'far Sadiq, and it will endure throughout the Cycle of cycles." However, it is difficult to reconstruct the tragic events which formed the early destiny of Ismailism. The victims were young enthusiasts whose aspirations must have focused upon the young Imam Isma'il, son of Imam Ja'far (one of Abu'l-Khattab's names is "Abu Isma'il," which Massignon interpreted as a sign of his being a godfather to the young Imam). But we do know that Imam Ja'far's disavowal in 755 C.E. provoked great consternation. Sev-

<sup>10</sup> See my *Etude préliminaire pour le "Livre réunissant les deux sagesse" de Nâsir-e Khosraw*, "Bibliothèque Iranienne," vol. III and IIIa, Teheran-Paris, 1953, pp. 14, sqq. W. Ivanow has devoted a long chapter to Abu'l-Khattab and to Khattabism in his book (which tends to discredit the "myth" of Abdullah ibn al-Qaddah) entitled *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism*, Bombay, 1946, pp. 113, sqq. Unfortunately, our late colleague considered all gnosticism and mysticism as a subject of clinical psychiatry. Hence one can neither demand nor expect from him, a treatment of the case of Abu'l-Khattab, or of Khattabism, which is adequate for research in religious studies.

<sup>11</sup> Kashi, *op. cit.*, p. 187; translated in Massignon, *Opera minora*, vol. I, p. 476. Of course the Imam would later deny that he said this. But we shall see that officially, he could not have acted otherwise, when we consider the esoteric explanation given elsewhere by Imam Ja'far himself, which we shall provide later.

<sup>12</sup> Tabarsi Nuri, *Nafas al-Rahman* (a large summary in Persian, which brings together all the traditions relating to Salman) lith. Teheran, 1285, A.H., chapter 5, p. 33; translated by Massignon, *loc. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Persian text edited by W. Ivanow, *Der Islam*, vol. XXIII, 1936. Cf. *Ummu'l-Kitab*, introduction, notes and translation by Pio Filippini-Ronconi, Naples, 1966.



enty adepts (the same number of adepts that we shall find gathered for the “liturgy of the Grail”), assembled in the mosque of Kufa, were massacred by order of the Abbasid governor, Isa ibn Musa. Abu’l-Khattab was captured and crucified in 762.

The survivors transferred their allegiance to Isma’il, and from then on Khattabism became, through them, identified with Ismailism. But who can imagine the secret drama which Imam Ja’far lived, when he learned of the martyrdom of the adept who had been faithful to him to death, beyond even the disavowal which the Imam had inflicted upon him? We do in fact learn that he allowed tears of compassion to be shed during an interview with ‘Abdullah ibn Bakir al-Rijani, who was close to him. The latter spoke of the fate of Abu’l-Khattab with tears in his eyes, and admitted that his grief was inconsolable. He even compared it with the case where the companions had answered the First Imam: “We remember the friendship which united us and the trials which they suffered. We also are stirred with compassion for them.” To which Imam Ja’far replied: “This is permitted.”<sup>14</sup>

To summarize the events which followed: the premature death of Imam Isma’il, who became the Seventh Imam of the Ismaili religion; Ja’far’s refusal of the legacy of the Imamate to his grandson, Mohammed, son of Isma’il, thereby resulting in the schism which created Ismaili Shiism. He accorded it instead to another of his sons, Musa al-Kazim (died 799), the Seventh Imam of the Twelver branch of Shiism.

This is the setting for the flowering of what I shall not follow others in calling the “myth” of Abu’l-Khattab (in current language, the word “myth” has degenerated to mean something

unreal, subject matter for “exposing myths”), but shall call his gnostic transfiguration. For those of his disciples endowed with *Malakuti* perception, this transfiguration gives his personage its full dimension, as manifested in the *Malakut* (the spiritual world of the Angel). This is a *mysterium liturgicum*, not a subject of the domain of historical fact and criticism. The Nusayri calendar has a holiday in the month of Dhu’l Hijja, described as “the day when Imam Ja’far — our blessings upon him — invested Mohammed ibn Zaynab (Abu’l-Khattab) and ordained him as a beacon among men, saying to him: ‘Mohammed (Abu’l-Khattab) is the Friend of all who call me their Lord. I am the enemy of whoever is his enemy.’” These are the same terms which the Prophet used with the First Imam, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.<sup>15</sup>

This liturgical extract is in perfect accord with the exaltation of Abu’l-Khattab to the rank of *nabi*. When the Eleventh Imam, Hasan al-‘Askari (died 874) was being held prisoner by the Abbasid regime, he was visited in his camp by one of his adept companions, Abu’l-Hasan al-‘Aqiqi. Contemplating him as in a theophanic vision, this companion saw the Imam seated, suspended in space over the roof of his own house. In front of him, and just below him, was Ibn Nusayr, he who is the “Portal” (the *Bab*) of the Imam for the Nusayris. ‘Aqiqi reports his own opening salutation: “O my Lord, may your blessings be upon the best of your creatures (Abu’l-Khattab), and may the blessing of the best of your creatures be upon your Elect, those who join with you and with him!” And the Imam answered: “O ‘Aqiqi, by my power and my glory! If only one of my companions is killed, I shall punish the guilty one with a punishment

<sup>15</sup> *Festkalender...*, p. 7, from the Arabic text, 1: 9–10.183.

<sup>14</sup> Kashi, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

which I did not inflict on anyone during all the worlds and cycles of Abraham the friend, Moses the interlocutor, and Jesus my Spirit (*Ruhi*), of Mohammed my beloved friend (*habibi*), and of Abu'l-Khattab, the mystery of my gnosis (*ghaybat 'ilmi*), for Abu'l-Khattab is Abu'l-Muttalib,<sup>16</sup> my intimate friend; whoever perishes, perishes through him; whoever is saved, is saved through him. By my power and my glory! For me, it is as if you contemplated him upon a mountain of Light. None may contemplate him, save those who are of my own Light. And then, it is as if I contemplate his companions gathered round him, those untroubled by doubt or uncertainty....” (cf. *Qur'an*, 5:61; 58:22).<sup>17</sup>

This is certainly a triumphal oration, sealing with its effulgence the unitary triad of the Eleventh Imam, Abu'l-Khattab, and Ibn Nusayr. But how did the adepts account for the repudiation of Abu'l-Khattab by Imam Ja'far? Let us consider Surat XVIII of the *Qur'an*, which has been an outstanding source of *ta'wil*, or esoteric symbolism. In this episode, Khidr (Khezzr, Khadir), the mysterious stranger who initiates Moses, commits various acts which Moses finds totally incomprehensible. Among others, there is the episode in verses 70 and 78, where Moses and Khidr find themselves in a ship, which the stranger subsequently breaches. Moses is indignant: “Do you intend to drown the people on it?” Later, Khidr reveals the meaning of his act: “That ship belonged to some poor people who work at sea. I destroyed it because a king was pursuing from behind, who intended to use violence to seize all ships.”

For Shiite gnosticism in general, the ship (*safina*) is the Ark of salvation, manifested through the persons of the “Fourteen Immaculates” as Fourteen Eons of Light. This is the ship of gnosis, boarded by those who want to escape from the abyss of the exoteric. The “poor” (*masakin*) who work at sea are those who have made their home (like *masakin*, from the same root *s-k-n*) in divine gnosis. The sea is knowledge, and its water signifies esoteric knowledge. The poor folk who “work at sea” are the members of the esoteric fellowship of all gnostics. These “poor” are in reality the Unique ones, the Nobles and Guides. Throughout the generations, the ship of gnosis is exposed to the fury of the same Antagonists. Their names are known. It turns out that the Most-Wise one prefers to destroy the ship so that it may not fall into the hands of the Antagonist.

However, a more specific *ta'wil* puts us on the track of a direct answer to the question: the ship is Abu'l-Khattab himself. Thus the incomprehensible act of Moses' preceptor in destroying the ship becomes the same as the Imam's act of disavowal of Abu'l-Khattab. One tradition relates that an adept declared to Imam Ja'far: “O my Lord, our epiphany (*zohur*) is interrupted since you condemned Abu'l-Khattab.” To which the Imam replied: “I breached the ship which belonged to poor people who work at sea, for a king is pursuing from behind, who will seize all ships with violence. If you see Abu'l-Khattab, tell him: ‘You are the ship!’ And the king is ‘Isa ibn Musa [the governor who later executed Abu'l-Khattab].”<sup>18</sup>

For gnostic consciousness, this is the answer to the enigma. Imam Ja'far was responsible for the safety of the entire Shiite community. The unfortunate Abu'l-Khattab was the boat which

<sup>16</sup> For now, this name given to Abu'l-Khattab is left unexplained.

<sup>17</sup> R. Strothmann, *Esoterische Sonderheiten bei den Nusairi, Geschichten und Traditionen von den heiligen Meistern aus dem Prophetenhaus*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1958, pp. 270–71 of the Arabic text. [The above narrative excerpt has been slightly abbreviated for relevance. — Ed.]

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298–301.

had advanced too far ahead. The secret had been profaned, and this was no longer the ship of salvation. By advancing too far at sea, the ship of gnosis became prey to the violent king who seizes all boats. The ship had to be evacuated and sacrificed, so that the pillager of boats would capture nothing more than a wreck. Thus Imam Ja'far was obliged to disavow Abu'l-Khattab. And, in order to remain faithful to himself, as well as to the Imam, Abu'l-Khattab accepted this disavowal, even unto death.

One must bear all this in mind while reading the liturgy through which Abu'l-Khattab, in a sense, officiated as a priest of the Grail. But first, some information regarding the doctrines which form the context of this ceremony.

## DOCTRINES

The general outlines of Khattabi/Nusayri gnosticism correspond to that of Shiite gnosticism, both Twelver and Ismaili. However, it is distinguished by some unique features. Very briefly,<sup>19</sup> we may say that its worldview includes a macrocosm of Light, a higher world which attracts beings from the human microcosm, to the extent that they purify themselves. This microcosm is also of the Light, but it is full of shadows, stained with filth and decay. On the other hand, the beings of the shadowy microcosm also settle into the accursed lowest macrocosm of the Shadows, undergoing the horrors of transmigration (*masukhiya*), which is the subject of frequent prayers for deliverance by adepts.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding the subsequent passages, cf.: *Festkalender...*, pp. 4 sqq. of the Introduction; my own study of Nasir-e Khusraw (Footnote 1 above); my *Trilogie ismaélienne*, in "Bibl. iranienne" vol. IX, Teheran-Paris 1961; and my *Islam iranien*, vol. IV, index under cycle.

This entails a theology which is radically apophatic (*via negationis*), as with other Shiite schools of theosophy. Absolute divinity remains hidden, ineffable, inaccessible. It can never be the referent of any Name nor Attribute. Yet from it emanates the Name (*Ism*) and the Meaning (*Ma'na*) which are manifested in each cycle by a fivefold group, a group of five theophanic figures who are especially discussed in the *Umm al-Kitab*, the Persian text mentioned previously. This is the source of the Islamic name of *Mokhammad* (pentadists), sometimes used for these gnostics. We hardly need point out the extensive Manichean influence found in these texts.

These theophanies cycles or periods of a cycle. In the Nusayri texts, these cycles and periods are designated as the "domes" (*qobbat*, plural *qibab*). The image is a striking one, because it indicates a visionary history whose temporal pattern is not that of linear evolution. Domes, or cupolas, are spatial rather than temporal images. The passage from one dome to another is not the outcome of some inherent historical causality, but the initiative of a single transcendental Light, whose modes of Manifestation take on the form of domes. No biological notion of mutation could ever apply to this kind of "history." On the contrary, the same *dramatis personae* recur within a framework of historical permanence: the permanence of the archetypal symbols of the "Book of Being," not a dialectical progression.

Each Manifestation, or epiphany, (*tajalli*, *zohur*) thus curves around on itself into a cycle, or dome. Now we may attempt to understand how the members of each dome are homologues of each other; not necessarily as "reincarnations," but as the same *dramatis personae* in a single and unique drama, where the same Antagonists meet again and again in every period.

The Shiite doctrine of prophets and imams surely has points in common with the teaching of the Verus Propheta of the

“Clementine Homilies,”<sup>20</sup> yet it also includes some important transpositions. The “Seal of the Prophets” in this case is Mohammed rather than Jesus Christ. Also, Shiism includes an open cycle of spiritual initiation following the cycle of prophecy, which is the *walayāt*, whose “Seal” is the Imamate. However, because the post-Mohammedan *wali* (friend of God) is one who in previous cycles was a pure and simple *nabi* (a prophet, but not of the rank of the Envoys), there still remains a possibility of non-closure — even of prophecy (*nubuwwat*). With great audacity, the novel of initiation entitled *Kitab al-ʿalim waʿl ghulam* (the Book of the Sage and the Disciple) proposes this, probably because it originated in a Qarmati milieu.<sup>21</sup> It is also the rejection of prophetic closure which permitted the elevation of Abuʿl-Khattab to the rank of *nabi*, as indicated in a previous citation.

In the Mohammedan cycle, the pentad is formed by the “Five Companions of the Mantle”: Mohammed, his daughter Fatima, her husband ‘Ali, and the young Imams Hassan and Hussein. In the texts we are examining, the name of Fatima has been masculinized (Fatim, Fatir: Fatima as *creator*). The same applies to all women associated with the prophets, including Maryam, mother of Jesus. It is as if these gnostics were applying the concluding Logion of the Gospel of Thomas: “For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>22</sup>

We also see that this pentad is expanded into a heptad by the addition of Salman Parsi and Abuʿl-Khattab.<sup>23</sup> Designated by the initials of their names, the Five Persons of the Mantle become the Names (*Asmaʿ*), or Principles. More exactly, they are no longer terrestrial “incarnations,” but epiphanies (*tajalliyat*), or forms of apparition (*mazahir*). They form one and the same substance of Light, not only with Mohammed, but also with the Names (*Asmaʿ*) of other cycles. These correspond to the same Antagonists who appear in cycle after cycle: in the cycle of Adam, manifested as Seth, Enos, etc.; in Persia, manifested as Shahpur, Ardashir, etc.<sup>24</sup> As mediators between the Five and the community of believers, we have the five “Unequaled” (*Aytam*, literally “orphans”). In the Mohammedan cycle, these are the five directing authorities of the Shiʿa, without themselves being partisans of ‘Ali.

Finally, besides the pentad, there is the triad symbolized by the letters ‘Ayn-Mim-Sin (‘A-M-S), which are the initial letters of the names of the Imam ‘Ali, the Prophet Mohammed, and Salman the Persian. Depending on which of these letters one places at the beginning, one obtains a corresponding school (the ‘Ayn adepts, the Mim adepts and the Sin adepts).<sup>25</sup> As Louis Massignon said: “It seems that it was Abuʿl-Khattab who at this time devoted his full force to the mission of *Sin*. But he did not identify this straightaway with the sanctifying *Ruh* (Spirit);

<sup>20</sup> Cf. H. Corbin, *Islam iranien*, vol. IV, index under *Verus Propheta*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. H. Corbin, “Un roman initiatique ismaélien du dixième siècle” originally published in *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, University of Poitiers, 1972, reprinted in *L’Homme et son ange*, Paris, Fayard, 1983, under the title of “L’initiation ismaélienne ou l’ésotérisme et le verbe,” pp. 81–205.

<sup>22</sup> *L’Evangile de Thomas*, translation and commentary by Jean-Yves Leloup, Albin Michel, Paris, 1986.

<sup>23</sup> *Esoterische sonderheiten...* pp. 14 (ultima)–15, p. 57 of German introduction. At pp. 278–80 of the text, one also finds a theophanic vision of the Five similar to that of the Umm al-Kitab.

<sup>24</sup> *Festkalender...*, §§ 335–337.

<sup>25</sup> See my study of this triad in “Le Livre du Glorieux de Jābir ibn Hayyān (alchimie et archetype)” in *L’Alchimie comme art hiératique*, Herne, 1986; also, *Festkalender...*, index, s.v. pp. 254–255; and *Morgenländische Geheimsekten*, p. 38, fol. 19 of the text.

he instead united them gradually through a process of spiritual Assumption, so that it underwent a process of deification which raised it above the Imam, which he made into a pentad (of Five Persons)...<sup>26</sup>

What is striking in these Nusayri texts in general, as well as in the "liturgy" whose translation shall be given presently, is the importance given to the Iranian cycle, and to the "Persian domes" (*qibab farsiya*) — even to the point that these seem to absorb the Christian cycle. There are the theophanies under the Adamic dome (the cycle of Adam), the dome of Noah, the dome of Abraham, the dome of Moses, and the domes of Persia. From these, we proceed to the Mohammedan dome, without the Christic dome (*masihiya*, the cycle of Christ) being expressly named in this context.<sup>27</sup> The Persian dome has four levels, or more precisely, consists of four domes. We note that the writer of the liturgical calendar avoids the terms "Mazdaism" or "Magianism" (*majusiya*), and instead speaks of "Bahmanism" (*bahmaniya*). For now, it is not entirely clear why this is done. We recall simply that *Bahman* is the Persian form of the Avestan term *Vohu-Manah* (*Eunoia* in Greek), designating the first of the six Archangels (*Amahraspandan*) emanating from Ormazd, who is the first of the heptad.

The four Bahmanian (or Mazdean) domes are theophanies (*zohurat*), and each has its own name.<sup>28</sup> The first is called the "major Bahmanian dome." "The first among the persons (*ashkhas*) who compose it is Gayomart, who was the Persian Adam; then come Tahmuras, Bahman, Hormoz, Jamshid, etc." As is the case for the other domes, this group of persons forms

a "perfect dome" (*qubbat kamila*). The second is the "sublime Bahmanian dome." Its leading figure is Zadan-Shah, then Ruzbeh Senior, then the Kayanid dynasty: Kay Qobad, Kay Ka'us, Kay Khusraw, Kay Lohrasp, Goshtasp (Vishtaspa, Zoroaster's protector).<sup>29</sup> The third is the "red Bahmanian dome," "which includes an explanation and an esoteric secret (*sirr*)." Its figures are Sohrab, Hushang, Dariush, Shahpur, Parviz, etc. The fourth is the "white Bahmanian dome:" Esfand-yar (hero of the Zoroastrian religion), Hormoz, Ardashir ben Babakan (founder of the Sassanid dynasty).

To the extent that we have been able to identify them, these figures do not seem to be ordered "chronologically" in the domes. Finally, after a grievous interval, or interregnum (*fatra qabiha*), the Lights arise from the Persian lands and come to those of the Arabs "for a long transitional period, until the Manifestation of the Hashimite dome."<sup>30</sup>

No less striking is the manner in which these gnostics represent the passage from the Iranian domes to the Mohammedan dome, which is of course the transition from Mazdaism to

<sup>29</sup> H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien...* vol. IV index under Kay, Kayanides. Regarding Tahmuras, Bahman, Hormoz, cf. note 60 here.

<sup>30</sup> The name *bahmaniya* and other Persian names recurs several times in the *Festkalender*. Since the veiling of the Light, Persians took Fire to be the *qibla*, because it most resembles the Light (§ 371). For the Iranian holiday of *Mehrgan*, a long invocation mentions the manifestation of the Light in the Persian Temples (*boyut farsiya*) and in the "bahmanian" holy places (§ 401). This same holiday is said to be "a Persian day and a Bahmanian celebration, O Emir of the Bees, which thou has ordained for thy friends and which is unveiled for thine elect." (§ 402). In the instructions for the festival of Now-Ruz (the Iranian new year), it is said that Sayyid-na Khasibi traced wisdom (*hikmat*, §§ 335, 368) back to the ancient Persians. Cf. also the "pre-eternal" (*azali*, § 404) Bahman. The letter *ba* of the "white Bahmanian dome" is invoked in the same manner as the *ba* of *bismillah* (pronounced "*basmallah*" in Persian accent) (§ 410).

<sup>26</sup> Louis Massignon, *Opera minora...* vol. I, p. 468.

<sup>27</sup> *Festkalender...*, §§ 380–381, pp. 313–314.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 373 sqq. p. 209.



Islam. The explanation takes the form of an exegesis of verse 54:6 from the *Qur'an*: "The day when the Caller shall call them to a difficult thing." This day is that of the Manifestation (*zohur*) of Salman the Persian (symbolized by the letter *Sin* = S). "In his right hand he holds a Grail (*ka's*, cup or chalice) in which is found the servant of the Light (*'abd al-nur*, c.f. the wine of the *Malakut* below). In his left hand he holds a lute (*oud*). He calls the people to the master Mohammed, guides them there, and brings about their conversion to Islam (this being the "difficult" thing). They inform him that they had been waiting for someone who would call them to a pure and simple worship (*din al-ikhlās*). Previously, one had appeared who called them to the Magian religion (*din al-majusiya*)... Then the lord Mohammed appeared, who called them to know and recognize him. And the people were confused because of the difference between two languages and two epiphanies: Bahmanian (Mazdean), and Mohammedan. When Mawlana, the Emir of the Bees<sup>31</sup> then manifested, who is the *Ma'na* (hidden meaning) and object of their devotion (*ma'būd*), he was seen holding Dhu'l-Fiqar (the wondrous sword) in his hand. The people then focused their contemplation on him. The lord Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon him) then told them: "Here is he who is your lord and companion (*mawla-kom*), 'Ali al-Kabir (Ali the Great)." Now, the Imam 'Ali is proclaimed as "the Sublime, the Great" in the *Qur'an*, verse 34:22.<sup>32</sup> We could not ask for clearer evidence of the formulation that it is

through the appearance of the Imam (mediated by Salman) — in other words, through Shiism — that the conflict between Islam and Mazdaism is overcome, accomplishing the passage from one dome to another. The consequences of this are all the more far-reaching, since this is a formula expressed in the Nusayri gnostic faith, rather than an explanation proposed by an Orientalist scholar.

This also opens the door to certain hidden meanings in some of the main allusions given in the "Grail liturgy." From the beginning of the liturgy, when he invites Musa ibn Ashyan to pass the cup among his brethren, Abu'l-Khattab declares to them: "You were among the Bahmanians (*kotom fi'l-bahmaniya*"); that is, you were, and are, of the Bahmanian dome. This could be interpreted literally, if we invoke the idea of reincarnation; but it could also be interpreted just as well by the simple idea of the homology of the dramatis personae: those who occupy certain places under the Bahmanian dome are the homologues of those who occupy the equivalent places under the other domes, throughout all the periods of the prophetic cycle.

This brings us to the most moving part of the ceremony. The cup circulates from hand to hand; each of the participants drinks his fill, yet the level of the cup's liquid does not diminish. This is exactly like the description of the ritual of the Holy Grail in the West: each of the knights of the Grail receives nourishment corresponding to his own state of being and desire, without any lessening of the cup's contents. But now Abu'l-Khattab raises his arm in the gesture of a high priest, lifts the cup above him, and traces a circle in the air. The cup slowly lifts from his hand, floating in the space of a "red dome" which suddenly opens around it with a blazing glow, whereupon Imam

<sup>31</sup> Among the Nusayri gnostics, the stars in the sky were contemplated as "bees." Each of them had his own star, which was his place of origin and return. This is the source of the designation of the Imam as "prince of the bees," i.e., prince of the stars.

<sup>32</sup> *Esoterische Sonderheiten*, p. 292 of the Arabic text.



Ja'far appears in its Light. Surrounded by the light of this "blaze of the Grail," the Imam then reveals the mystery of the "wine of the *Malakut*" (the wine of the Angelic world), which is reserved for its elect. This supreme visionary moment is completed by the re-descent of the Grail. But this time, it is empty: all of the Invisible ones of the other domes, throughout all the long ages of the world, have also been participating in the ritual, here and now. Rather than a chronological succession, we have here a simultaneous order of spiritual space-time, where all are assembled in "co-presence" with each other.

Later, Abu'l-Khattab explains that the Grail is the same cup of Tahmuras. He was, and is, under his own dome, the Emir of the Bees: the Bahmanian homologue of the Imam 'Ali. He gives Bahman to drink his fill of the cup, and Bahman gives Hormoz to drink. Hormoz is the homologue of Abu'l-Khattab. Here we find the names of the Iranian figures cited previously as making up the first "Persian" or "Bahmanian" dome. The homology between the domes seems to be an example of the "science of Balance" (*mizan*) practiced by alchemists, which is also the foundation of all "science of correspondences."

On several other occasions, the ritual involves the liturgical intervention of the "servant of the Light" (*'abd al-nur*), which is the sacramental wine which our text calls "the wine of the *Malakut*." Salman the Persian has already been mentioned as appearing holding the Grail in his right hand. The usage of the cup is also prescribed for the commemoration of Adhar 17, which is the calling of Ibn Nusayr.<sup>33</sup> In the ritual of the feast commemorating the Day of the Pool (*Ghadir*, the day of the investiture of Imam 'Ali by the Prophet), the assembly stands.

A great cup is filled, and when all have held their hands up to God, it is passed from one participant to another.<sup>34</sup> A sermon for this same day declares: "Brethren, today is the celebration our Friends, the gnostics, receive the gratifying revelations which their lord and companion has given them...and they are sanctified (or celebrate the sacrament) of the servant of the Light."<sup>35</sup> The nocturnal ritual of the half-Sha'ban (anniversary night of the birth of the Twelfth Imam) commands the faithful to gather this night, keeping watch in joy and light-heartedness; the "servant of the Light" will bless them with edifying encounters.<sup>36</sup>

These liturgical references are the best framework for appreciating the ceremonial visionary recital which follows. There is one final characteristic to be mentioned. We had a suggestion of the sense in which the idea of reincarnation might be related to the mystery of the cup which has re-descended from the heights of the dome, empty because of the Invisibles who have participated. No doubt those who participate in the ritual around Abu'l-Khattab "were already there." But the converse is not necessarily true — not all of those who "were there" will have to "return," because they have fully satisfied the finality of their terrestrial existence. But they are nonetheless assembled in the invisible space of the *Malakut*, and they participate in the Grail liturgy celebrated on Earth by those who have had to return. This shows how the necessity of returning to this world is precisely the danger which these gnostics seek to avoid, whether it means a "beginning-again" (*takrir*) in another

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, § 110, 1.7–11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, § 114.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, § 2273.

<sup>33</sup> *Festkalender*, § 27, 1.5.

human body (*tanasokh*), or the horror of transmigration into the body of an animal (*masukhiya*) or a plant (*raskh*).<sup>37</sup> Having drunk of the beverage of the Malakut, the companions question Abu'l-Khattab about the necessity of return. He explains to them that it is due to their lack (*taqsir*) of being what each of them should be. It is a falling-short of one's true being. The most serious type of lack is that of love for one another.

Thus the *Khabar al-sharab*, the liturgy of the wine of the Malakut, comes to an end with this reminder to the companions of the first and last precept of the *futuwwat*, or *javanmardi*, of their "spiritual chivalry." This brings us back to the starting-point of my research, since it was the ritual of the cup described in the *Futuwwat-Nameh* which reminded me of this recital of the liturgy celebrated by Abu'l-Khattab. Its allusions should not be too difficult to understand now.

#### "THE WINE OF THE MALAKUT"

'Abdullah al-Barqi reports the words of al-Bythura'i (?):<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Consider for example these instructions for the Now-Ruz festival, (in *Festkalender* § 360): "It is reported that Abu'l-Khattab said that Ruz in Farsi is the shield against *masukhiya*. His *tafsir* in Arabic is that whoever has known God on the day of Now-Ruz is protected from *masukhiya*." It would seem that this point of view agrees well with that of Ismaili eschatology: the human being who is degraded to the level of an animal must "begin again" in the form of this animal. The human being who has fully realized his faith as a human is fulfilled beyond this world, in the "Temple of Light" of the Imamate. See the second treatise translated and published in my *Trilogie ismaélienne* (note 19 here), and its index under *tanasokh*, Temple of Light.

<sup>38</sup> The Arabic text of this recital was published by R. Strothmann in *Esoterische Sonderheiten...* pp. 207–216 of the text, with a German translation, pp. 15–17. My own French translation differs little from his German rendering.

Mohammed ibn Sinan told me the following, which he heard from Abu Harun the blind...who told him:

I had gone to visit Mohammed ibn Abi Zaynab [Abu'l-Khattab], the father of good people and good things,<sup>39</sup> may he be revered! Seventy men were present, the elect among his followers, come from different countries.<sup>40</sup> Among them was Musa ibn Ashyam, [later to be] a martyr [*shahid*], and the Mohammed ibn Abi Bakr of his time....<sup>41</sup>

There was lengthy discourse among them. Finally, Abu'l-Khattab said to them: "O companions! Do you desire the drink?"

We: And what drink?

A-Kh.: The drink [wine] of the Malakut [*sharab al-Malakut*].<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> This attribute, *Abu'l-Tayyibat wa'l-Tayyibin*, was translated by Strothmann as *Vater der guten Werke und Menschen* for good reason, for it would be difficult to make a case for "good women and good men." (p. 14, l.32). *Tayyibat* frequently designates good things, and Abu'l-Khattab is the man of good works.

<sup>40</sup> As noted before seventy is the number of the martyrs gathered in the mosque of Kufa. But this might also be a numerological exaltation of seven.

<sup>41</sup> Two other obscure figures are named here, and matched with two other equally obscure ones: Abu Isma'il, merchant of embroidered cloth; and Abu Shama, merchant of oil and butter. In order to avoid a cumbersome translation, I have only included Musa ibn Ashyam, who is to play an active role in the liturgy which follows, and who no doubt was also one of the Kufa martyrs. I have arranged this text in convenient dialogue form, so as to avoid the tedious repetition of *qala...qala...* (he said...he said...) for the interaction of the participants.

<sup>42</sup> A brief reminder of the universal realms: *Mulk* (the world of sense-perception); *Malakut* (the spiritual world which includes the mundus imaginalis (*alm al-mithal*), or world of species governed by Angels); *Jabarut* (the world of pure, or cherubic Intelligences); *Labut* (the world of the Deity). See also note 52 below. The fact that this beverage is named for the Malakut already shows that we are dealing with a sacred ritual, and that its action occurs at the vision-ary level of that world. Cf. also note 49 below.

*We:* You have nourished us through your knowledge of the *Malakut*; now give us to drink our fill of its brew.

*A-Kh.:* The wine of the *Malakut* is for you; the wine of the gates of Hell [*Balhut*] is for others.<sup>43</sup>

*We:* And what is the wine of the *Balhut*?

*A-Kh.:* The blood of Iblis [Ahriman], may God condemn him! But the drink [wine] of the *Malakut* is the pure beverage which God has described as the drink of his friends [*li-awliya'ih*] in paradise. [And Abu'l-Khattab recites the Qur'anic verse 47:16:] "Rivers of wine, and delights for those who drink of it." Therefore, drink of it in perfect knowledge and in total truth.<sup>44</sup>

*We:* Then give us to drink our fill, in perfect knowledge and in total truth.

Then he called out: "O young girl!" She quickly arrived, and he told her: "Bring the drink for the bodies of earthly men." She brought a wineskin filled with a brilliant radiance, and a cup which shone with the golden light of dawn. Then he said: "It is with this that God gratifies his friends." Then he set the cup down and recited: "You shall feel neither intoxication nor headache from it." [cf. *Qur'an* 56:19: "A drink which causes neither excess nor intoxication."].

<sup>43</sup> We might consider the possible relation between this "wine of Hell" which is the "blood of Iblis," and the other ritual of the wine-cup practiced by the companions of Abu Jahl, the uncle and adversary of the Prophet. Regarding Abu Jahl "the accursed," see *Safinat Bihâr al-Anwâr*, I, 199–200.

<sup>44</sup> *Ma'rifatan wa-haqiqatan*. From the classic 'irfani vocabulary, cf. the triad recalled at the beginning of this essay: *shari'at*, *tariqat*, *haqiqat*. The relationship between this triad and the *ma'rifat* is that of spiritual truth and the gnosis of this truth. Cf. the seventh *Futuwwat-Nameh* of the treatise cited in note 1, §§ 31–32.

Then Abu'l-Khattab said to Musa ibn Ashyam: "Begin! Let your brothers drink their fill. And when the drink has passed to all, then by this cup you hold in your hand, your bodies shall be filled for all the periods and cycles to come. For you belong to the holy of holies [*quds al-muqaddasin*], and you were of the Bahmanians,<sup>45</sup> among the number of the most excellent and noble of them. I have displayed the world for them, and filled them with its delights. I fulfill you with its magnificence, and by my power, give you what I have given no other."

Musa ibn Ashyam stood up and said: "O my lord! From your hand, give me a drink which shall satisfy the thirst of him who drinks his fill of it, throughout the centuries of centuries and the eternity of eternities."

[Abu Harun the blind] thus continues his recital: Then Abu'l-Khattab poured the wine into the cup. He presented the cup to Musa, and Musa drank from it until he was satisfied. Abu'l-Khattab then told him: "Now give the cup to your brother, Abu Isma'il."<sup>46</sup> He then drank until his own thirst was satisfied, without any decrease in the contents of the cup. All thus drank their fill in turn. Finally, having circulated among all present, the cup returned, exactly as full as it was at the beginning.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See above, for the sense of "Bahmanian" here. In the statements which immediately follow, Abu'l-Khattab's use of the first person is of a "theopathic" type of language.

<sup>46</sup> Abu'l-Khattab presents the cup to Musa: *nawala-hu* is a term of Arabic Christian liturgy for "giving Holy Communion" to someone. The cup thus passes from companion to companion, like the ritual performed in the *futuwwat* (see above, § I: the Prophet presents the cup of salted water to 'Ali, who passes it to Salman, who passes it to Hodhayfa, etc.)

<sup>47</sup> This is the same as with the Holy Grail, the source of Life (c.f., 'ayn al-hayat) which can never be exhausted. See *La Quête du Graal* (= La quête del Saint-Graal), edited by A. Béguin and Yves Bonnefoy, Paris, 1965, p. 194.

Then Abu'l-Khattab held the cup up, moving it around in a circle. As he traced out the form of the circle, we regarded it intently; then the cup lifted up, rising little by little, floating in space, until it came to its resting place. At this moment, we beheld the Lord [*al-Sayyid*, the Imam Ja'far], looking upon us from the heights of this space. He was underneath a red dome,<sup>48</sup> built from a unique pearl, whose light shone from the East to the West. The air was filled with a perfume of musk.

The lord-companion Imam Ja'far, giver of our salvation, then proclaimed his secret: "O Mohammed [ibn Abi Zaynab, Abu'l-Khattab], I quench the thirst of my faithful adepts, the pure, the noble, the just, with this drink which I have forbidden to common libertines. I have offered it to my faithful who are present in this world and in the other world. But to the common libertines I have imposed yoke and chains, and have sent them into the desert of those who lose their way."<sup>49</sup>

As for us, we were rapt in contemplation of the beauty and Light which radiated from the dome. Then my lord [the Imam] spoke to us again: "I have chosen you, I have attracted you to me, and you have come near by remaining with my Friends. If it had been otherwise, your eyes would have been torn out by

the power of this Light, and you would have fainted in terror upon hearing this voice. But I have made it so that this is an honor for you and a disgrace for your adversaries. Therefore, welcome this in recognition, for today is the day of surplus." And the Imam recited this verse [*Qur'an* 10:27]: "To those who have done good, the most beautiful of rewards, and even with a surplus. No dust nor humiliation shall cover their faces. For they are the hosts of paradise, where they shall dwell immortal."<sup>50</sup>

At this moment the cup began to re-descend towards us. But this time it was empty, with not a drop remaining. Then Abu'l-Khattab said to his companions: "Behold, this cup has circulated through the temples of all the non-Arabs, throughout all the seven periods of the world. All of them are your brothers in faith and in gnosis [or your brothers, the gnostic believers]. You have drunk with them from this cup, for you are of the number of their Nobles. And I have given you to drink your fill of this beverage today, just as I gave you to drink of it in the times which came before."<sup>51</sup>

Then Abu'l-Khattab took the cup, filled it again, and gave it to Musa ibn Ashyam, telling him: "May God give you life, O

<sup>48</sup> Earlier, we noted the red color of the third of the Bahmanian domes. The appearance of this particular color as an aura around the theophanic vision of the Imam is connected with a principle of symbolism. See H. Corbin: "Symbolisme et réalisme des couleurs en cosmologie shi'ite" in *Temple et contemplation*, Paris, Flammarion, 1981. We also know of the importance of the color red in the Western Grail cycle: "...the Knight (Galahad) appeared in scarlet armor, the color of fire." (*La Quête du Graal*, pp. 57, 123)

<sup>49</sup> The use of wine is thus legitimate, as "servant of the Light" (*abd al-nur*), drink of the *Malakut*, only when it is consumed as part of a sacred ritual, or liturgical ceremony. The profane use of it remains forbidden. This will be further emphasized in answer to a question of one of the companions. Cf. note 56.

<sup>50</sup> For the notion of surplus, see D. Masson, *Le Coran*, "Bibl. de la Pléiade" Paris, 1967. He refers to commentators who think that this vision of God is in contrast to the Christian notion of Beatitude, which consists of an essence (rather than a surplus) of a "beatific vision." The rigorous apophatic theology of Shiism excludes the latter. On the other hand, it results in a vision of theophanies (*tajalliyat*, *mazahir*), which take the form of the holy Imams. We thus infer that this "Shiite Grail liturgy" is marked by the theophanic vision of the Imam. To say, as is said later on, "You are in the house of surplus" (*dar al-mazid*) is equivalent to saying, "You are in the presence of the Imam."

<sup>51</sup> We have already given some indications as to the interpretation of the "sign" of the ascension and re-descent of the Grail, which completes the visionary ceremony.

Friend of the Merciful!" And Abraham, Friend of the Merciful, took the cup in his hands and drank from it.<sup>52</sup>

Then the lord [Abu'l-Khattab] said: "May God's drink bring great good unto you. By my life! Through this drink, you have tasted the knowledge of the *Malakut*, the knowledge of that which was in the first of the centuries, and is throughout all the ages and cycles of the world.<sup>53</sup> Henceforth, you can speak any language. Having tasted of this drink, you know the language of the birds (*mantiq al-tayr*),<sup>54</sup> and the language of all that breathes upon the surface of the earth."

<sup>52</sup> The text is so elliptic here that it is puzzling at first. Strothmann had no explanation for this sudden appearance of Abraham: it is not a personal name of any of the participants, nor a term of comparison. However, on deeper reading the connection is revealed. Abu'l-Khattab invites Musa to drink from the cup by addressing him by the meaning of Abraham's name: Friend of the Merciful. In this way, he becomes Abraham, hence "Abraham, Friend of the Merciful, took the cup in his hands and drank from it." This is a kind of mystical topology, which gives an orientation to the whole context. It is later said to Musa: "Through this drink, you have tasted the knowledge of the *Malakut*." Musa has therefore re-enacted the example of Abraham, whom "We caused to see the *Malakut* of the heavens and the Earth." (*Qur'an*, 6:75)

<sup>53</sup> The Fifth Imam, Mohammed Baqir, responded to a disciple who asked him the meaning of this Qur'anic verse about Abraham by inducing in this disciple's mind the vision of the universe of the Imams who have already manifested in this world — in this case, the five. In fact twelve esoteric universes correspond to the Twelve Imams. See my *Islam iranien*, vol. IV, index under *Malakut*.

<sup>54</sup> With knowledge of the *Malakut*, such is the mystical boon given to the participant in this ritual of the cup. Its virtues are comparable with those of the Grail of Jamshid and of Kay Khusraw, which are described elsewhere (*Islam iranien*...index under Graal). One might compare this with the blessings bestowed by the Holy Grail, as source of immortality and eternal youth (earlier, Musa had asked for a beverage which would quench their thirst throughout the centuries of centuries). The *Qur'an* (27:16) mentions that the gift of understanding the language of the birds was given to Solomon. *Mantiq al-tayr* is of course the title of the great mystical epic of 'Attar. See Helmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele, Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariduddin*

Afterward, Musa ibn Ashyam was to say: "I bear witness to Him who created me in harmony!"<sup>55</sup> After drinking from this cup, there remained no being nor any thing, neither on earth nor in heaven, nor anywhere in between, whose language remained hidden to me."

Then Abu'l-Khattab had each of us partake of the beverage, and he told us: "Today you are in the house of surplus. Speak then, and I shall listen. Supplicate, pray, and welcome any appeals."

We: May this drink be allowable for our absent friends, even as you have allowed it for us.

A-Kh.: This wine is allowed for your brothers, when they are in the company of brothers in faith and in gnosis. But this wine is forbidden to you and to them, when in the company of any but your brothers.<sup>56</sup> For God has required your act of drinking your fill and nourishing yourselves with this beverage, by

'Attar, Leyde, 1955, index. The "birds" symbolize the mystics as inhabitants of the *Malakut*. In Suhrawardi's prologue to the "Story of the Crimson Archangel" a questioner asks: "Do the birds understand each others' language?" See also *Islam iranien*... vol II, p. 246, and vol. IV index under *Mantiq al-tayr*; and Corbin, *L'Archange empourpré*, Fayard, 1976.

<sup>55</sup> An allusion to the Qur'anic verses 32:8, 75:38, and 87:2.

<sup>56</sup> See notes 42 and 49. It is only the esoteric, ceremonial usage of wine which is not in violation of the *shari'at* (cf. the Ismaili precept of *alamuti*, according to which even the person of *haqiqat*, or divine truth, must observe the *shari'at* when in profane company). See also the text quoted in Strothmann, p. 17, note 1: "The Imam Ja'far had just passed near a group of Shiites, and asked them: 'What are you doing here?' They replied: 'O Master, we are passing the servant of Light ('abd al-nur) among us, and we are chanting together the hymn of wisdom of true faith in you.' And the Imam answered: Do this, then. But otherwise [i.e., if any profane persons had been present], do not do this.'" Elsewhere (p. 296 in text), Mofazzal al-Jo'fi questions the Imam about the eating of meat, marriage, etc. The answer is the same: "When you are in the company of the faithful, it is legitimate. Otherwise, not...."



removing the four basic polluted Natures from you, those which are the cause of blame.<sup>57</sup> Do you know by what grace you have attained to this eminent rank, this sublime and noble degree?

*We:* By what grace have we then attained it?

*A-Kh.:* God is thanking you for a certain action in yourselves, and is rewarding it.

*We:* And what is this action?

*A-Kh.:* Imagine that one of you had just gone to bed. Having just placed his head upon his pillow, the thought comes to him of one of his brothers who is weaker, and who has been left behind in regards to food, drink, clothing, and does not even possess a mount. This makes him rise from his bed in consternation, so anxious that he goes straight to this brother, and puts his affairs in order as if they were his own. Well, it is by this manner of action that you have been raised to this high degree and eminent rank.<sup>58</sup>

Musa ibn Ashyam: Glory to God! How sublime is the spiritual virtue of this action, both inwardly and outwardly (*zahiran wa batinan*, exoterically and esoterically).

*A-Kh.:*<sup>59</sup> This is the cup of Tahmuras. He was the Emir of the Bees under the first Bahmanian dome. It was he who presented

the cup to Bahman — and Bahman is the most sacred of names (*al-ism al-muqaddas*). Bahman passed the cup to Hormoz, and I was Hormoz, whom Bahman bade drink from the cup.<sup>60</sup> I was thereupon filled with knowledge, wisdom and intelligence. This is why I desired that you find solace in this cup. Indeed, what is it that shields the efforts of believers to console each other from the vanities of Iblis? They refrain from these vanities with their spiritual brothers, yet they heap them upon their own flesh and blood. Surely they will suffer painful punishment in the other world. For it is this, or something equivalent to it, that produces rebirth (*takrir*, returning) in this world.

*We:* Why is this beginning-again in earthly bodies necessary?

*A-Kh.:* Because one falls short of one's task (*taqsir*). Rebirth is for those who never succeed in purifying themselves in the course of these returnings. They know full well that it is because of their lack of love for one another that they must undergo punishment. In spite of this, they waste their lives, realizing nothing. This is why their beginning-again will go on for a long time.<sup>61</sup>

*Musa ibn Ashyam:* In even a single part of this process, there is something which will suffice for anyone who is not a hyp-

<sup>57</sup> This invites comparison with the purification and treatment of the Natures in alchemy.

<sup>58</sup> This is once more the ethics of *futuwwat* and *javanmardi*, whose ritual of the cup was our point of departure. As Musa ibn Ashyam immediately sees, the act of fraternal love must be understood in both an esoteric and an exoteric sense. Concerning the esoteric sense of "legitimate alms," see my analysis of an Ismaili novel of initiation (note 21 here). The esoteric sense of refusal of alms can also be a cause of *takrir* (transmigration), as we see here.

<sup>59</sup> At this point, Abu'l-Khattab is once more referred to as Abu-Tayyibat (see note 39), which we have not included in the translation, so as not to interrupt the flow of dialogue.

<sup>60</sup> Regarding Tahmuras (Takhma Urupi), see M.N. Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism*, New York, 1938, index. Under the "major Bahmanian dome," he is the homologue of the First Imam, since he is called "Emir of the Bees." (see note 31). The text reminds us of the most sacred nature of the name Bahman, for this is in effect the name of the first Archangel (Amahraspand) who emanated from Ohrmazd. Under the first dome, there were two figures who bore the names of Bahman (Vohu Manah) and Hormoz (Ohrmazd). One passed the cup to the other just as in the present ritual, and by virtue of the law of homology and "beginning again," Abu'l-Khattab was then Hormoz: under the Mohammedan dome, he is what Hormoz was under the first Persian dome.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. last part of previous section, and note 37.



ocrite. Blessed are the gnostics faithful to God, both for themselves and for their fellows. "Blessed are they! A magnificent refuge is prepared for them." [*Qur'an* 13:28]

*A-Kh.*: Do you know what is meant by a magnificent refuge?

*We*: No!

*A-Kh.*: It is the faithful believer's store of good deeds; it belongs to him by virtue of his achievement of the totality of his desire, while remaining within the bounds of purity. Therefore, stand up now! You are people who walk on the path of goodness, as the beloved of God. I ask God to assemble you all together in the place where He loves.

Abu Harun now concluded: "Then the companions parted in happiness and lightness of heart. Never have I seen such a gathering of such beauty and light as in this assembly. We were brought together by the grace of God, which had descended upon us along with his benevolence. This is what our lord (*Sayyid-na*) Abu'l-Khattab has brought about especially for us, during the ceremony of the Cup, with the grace that it brings."

"Glory be to God, Lord of the worlds. This recital is at an end."